

## Recycling electronic waste is getting easier

Last weekend, Missoula County held a free (or nearly free) electronic waste collection event. Sponsored by Sony Corporation with help from Vann's Electronics, the event allowed people to safely dispose of computers, monitors, printers and other so-called e-waste at a very reasonable cost.

Thousands of people participated in the event, and after the dust had cleared, volunteers had amassed 14 semi-truck loads of e-waste! Based on numbers from a similar event in Bozeman last year, Missoula County Water Quality District personnel estimated they collected between 80 and 100 tons material -- in less than one day!

"We were absolutely and completely overwhelmed," said Michelle Hutchins. "We expected a large turnout, but we never expected it to be this big."

Folks involved in the Bozeman e-waste event said the same thing. Apparently people hang on to their old computers and, when given a chance to dispose of them properly, turn out en masse.

This is good because computers, monitors, printers, televisions and the like contain dangerous heavy metals, including lead and mercury. Merely tossing them into a trash bin (or into a river or ditch as is sometimes done) makes it likely that such heavy metals will eventually contaminate our environment. Our department received a complaint several months ago that someone had actually heaved a couple of computers off the Darby Bridge into the Bitterroot River.

## Year-round disposal options

It's important to safely and responsibly dispose of such e-waste, and fortunately, businesses nationwide are making such safe disposal much easier.

Staples encourages customers to recycle e-waste by simply bringing their used computers, monitors, laptops, and desktop printers, faxes and all-in-ones to any Staples store in the U.S.

All brands are accepted, regardless of whether the equipment was purchased at Staples. A recycling fee of \$10 per piece of large equipment is charged to cover handling, transport, product disassembly and recycling. Smaller computer peripherals such as keyboards, mice, and speakers are accepted at no charge.

According to Staples' Web site, equipment is bagged and sealed when received at the Staples customer service desk. The equipment is then picked up and delivered to its recycling provider Eco International, who uses industry-leading standards for data destruction and disassembles the equipment into its component parts for environmentally responsible recycling.

Costco also has a new program for its members which allows them to recycle computers and other e-waste. And Pete's Palmer Electric in Missoula (543-3086) takes e-waste, but charges a little more than Staples or Costco.

For more information on year-round e-waste disposal options go to this link on the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Web site:

[www.deq.state.mt.us/Recycle/Electronics/ManufacturerTakeBack](http://www.deq.state.mt.us/Recycle/Electronics/ManufacturerTakeBack)

### Ravalli County's Household Hazardous Waste Event

As previously reported, Ravalli County will hold its first-ever Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event on May 16 and 17 at the north lot of the Ravalli County Fairgrounds. This is a reminder to folks that we will not take e-waste at this event.

Our reason for leaving electronic waste off the list of accepted materials was the possibility that we might be overwhelmed. The results from the e-waste event in Missoula last weekend indicate that we made a wise choice.

Next year, we hope to have our own e-waste event in Ravalli County, but it will mean finding a deep-pocketed sponsor such as Sony Corporation to fund the event. In the meantime, we encourage you to take advantage of the growing number of ecologically conscious businesses that accept e-waste.

And please, whatever you do, don't throw your e-waste into the river!

*In order to help citizens understand more clearly many of the environmental health issues in Ravalli County and the role of the Environmental Health Department in addressing these issues, our department will run a series of weekly newspaper articles titled "Environmental Health Talk."*

*In this ongoing series we hope to help raise the community's awareness of issues such as air and water quality and give readers useful tips on topics like recycling, collecting and disposing of hazardous materials and maintaining septic systems, just to name a few. To this end, we welcome public comment. If there's an environmental health issue you'd like us to address, write call or email the department: RCEH, c/o "EnviroHealth Talk," 215 South 4<sup>th</sup> St, Suite D, Hamilton MT 59840. Phone: 375-6571. Email: [rdaniel@ravallicounty.mt.gov](mailto:rdaniel@ravallicounty.mt.gov)*